

THE TENNESSEAN

Williamson County's income rise is chalked up to Nissan While Williamson continues to draw the affluent, Davidson County attracts the middle class

By Chris Echegaray • THE TENNESSEAN • September 22, 2009

Fred Standish, with hundreds of co-workers, made the move to Williamson County with his family and his salary as director of corporate communications for Nissan North America Inc.

Local economists say it's likely that Standish and others relocating with the company in 2006 and shortly after are the reason Williamson County saw a jump in median household income in 2008.

The latest census report released today shows Williamson County enjoyed a 10 percent spike in 2008 median household income, going from \$85,101 in 2007 to \$93,321 last year. Meanwhile, other Middle Tennessee counties, including Davidson, struggled through the economic climate. Wilson County showed declines for two years in median household income while Rutherford and Sumner showed some gains.

"You don't see any big increases in a recession unless there's a special reason," said David Penn, an economist with Middle Tennessee State University. "It must be Nissan. What else could it be? It is a surprising gain but you have a mix of things and folks ... athletes, specialists, doctors, who decide to live there."

Recruiting pays off

For years, the economic plan in Williamson County has been to target corporate businesses to move their headquarters there and keep them there, said Matt Largen, director of the Williamson County Office of Economic Development.

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MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Davidson County

2008 \$46,153

2007 \$48,139

Rutherford County

2008 \$54,012

2007 \$52,298

Sumner County

2008 \$55,167

2007 \$52,634

Williamson County

2008 \$93,321

2007 \$85,101

Wilson County

2008 \$57,713

2007 \$62,128

"Nissan and the health industry had a lot to do with the success and factors in the increase in median income," Largen said. "You have decision-makers, top-level executives from all across the country moving here. It's been our plan since the 1990s to recruit headquarters."

Standish works out of the corporate building overlooking Cool Springs. He made the move with his wife and three children in the summer of 2006. There's no hour-plus commute as in Los Angeles traffic. Work is a short trip from his Brentwood home.

"Proximity is a big thing," Standish said. "It's a good spot. We've enjoyed it and our three children are all dialed into the community."

Standish, however, wouldn't say how much he earns as spokesman for Nissan. "We're doing OK," he said.

Overall growth reflected

While Williamson County continues to draw the affluent, Davidson County attracts the middle class. Davidson County's median household income fell by 4 percent to \$46,153 in 2008.

But the median income is not showing the complete picture, said Paul Ney, director of the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development.

Nashville has experienced some growth in population not necessarily in a higher tax bracket, Ney said.

"We have to take that into consideration," he said. "Our continued growth is in the urban core and some of that is at a lower income level. When you break it down, you see that it could be a distorted picture."

Williamson County's increase is not a negative for Nashville or the surrounding counties, Ney said. It bolsters the health of Middle Tennessee as a place for businesses and residential growth, he said. "I don't think it's a zero-sum game," Ney said. "It's a reflection of our overall growth."

In fact, the number of households in Williamson County grew from 56,539 to 59,204 from 2006 to 2008.

Davidson County also saw growth among households during the same period, going from 249,023 to 257,193.